



9-1-1 A Vital Link

The Winter Months – Busiest for Emergency Crews Do You Know What to Say When You Call 9-1-1?

When somebody calls 911 for help – the men and women of the Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service respond. Certain types of injuries, illness and even structure fires seem to occur more often around this time of the year. Typically, the winter months of December, January and February are busiest for fire and rescue crews.

The fires are often the result of food left cooking unattended, combustibles too close to a heating system, malfunction in a chimney flues and a malfunction with heating/air conditioner units. During the winter months, home heating systems and heating equipment continue to be significant factor in structural fires in Montgomery County. Many of these fires can be prevented.

Injuries are typically those associated with slips, falls or vehicle collisions, more often than not related to cold weather conditions, while the illnesses may be associated to the recent spread of influenza (flu) or predisposing medical conditions related to stroke or heart disease. Over seventy percent of the calls for help are associated with emergency medical services.

Whatever the need for emergency services, Montgomery County emergency call takers will ask specific questions in order to send the most appropriate help. In doing so for medical emergencies, dispatchers use a special screening process called Emergency Medical Dispatch (EMD). The 911 call taker will normally ask a series of questions to come up with an appropriate level of response based on the information provided by the caller.

Of course, the first and most important bits of information required are the address and phone number, in case there is a disconnect or other issue during the 911 call process. In order to determine the most efficient response during a fire, call takers may ask what is on fire, is everyone safe and out of the building, is anyone injured, and ask where is the fire located.

If a medical call is being reported, call takers will ask questions such as age and gender, and the exact problem being reported. Next, a series of questions that may follow, for a sick person:

- Is he/she breathing normally?
- Does he/she have chest pain?
- Is he/she bleeding or vomiting blood?
- Does he/she have a history of heart problems?

The number of questions needed to produce the most appropriate response increases with the seriousness of the medical problem. For instance, we may ask a specific set of questions over and above the medical questions for calls such as an assault or a person in an automobile collision. These additional questions are essential in determining whether the scene is safe for victims and emergency responders, if hazardous conditions are present, or if additional or specialized rescue equipment may be needed.

Additionally, if a patient is in cardiac arrest, or childbirth is imminent, there are Pre-Arrival Instructions that fire and rescue dispatchers can give to help the caller in providing life-saving actions such as CPR and childbirth assistance. These

instructions follow the protocols set forth by the State of Maryland Medical Protocols.

All of these questions can take time to ask, and at times to the caller it may seem that fire and rescue personnel may not be acting quick enough to send help. However, in most cases when there are additional questions being asked or instructions given, the call has already been sent via computer to be dispatched. Often units are alerted to respond and enroute while additional information is gathered over the telephone.

Additional question that may be asked for medical emergencies:

- Did he/she faint or pass out?
- Is he/she completely awake?
- Is his/her condition worsening?
- Has he/she ever had an allergic reaction to this before?
- Is there any serious bleeding?
- When did this start?
- Is he/she changing color?
- Is he/she clammy?
- Does he/she have a history of heart problems?
- Does he/she have asthma?

The Montgomery County Public Safety Communications Center, Fire and Rescue Emergency Operations Center is staffed entirely by firefighters all of whom are Emergency Medical Technicians, including some specially trained as Paramedics, critical incident stress management, search and rescue, hazardous materials, foreign languages and other special skills. All fire and rescue communication personnel are nationally certified as Emergency Medical Dispatch personnel. Fire and Rescue communication personnel dispatch an average of nearly 300 emergency calls a day.

